

## SEATTLE FIRE DEPARTMENT

### Information Bulletin #965



## Key Boxes for Emergency Access

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Seconds count in a life-threatening medical emergency or a fire. Yet many times, Fire Fighters responding to an emergency find access blocked by locked entrance doors or gates. To help reduce delays in providing emergency assistance, the Seattle Fire Department has adopted use of the *Knox Rapid Entry System*.

### Knox Rapid Entry System

Used by Fire Departments throughout the country, the primary component of the Knox Rapid Entry System is a key box unique to the jurisdiction in which it is located. Only the Seattle Fire Department will have access to boxes used in this city. Use of the system may improve emergency service to building owners and occupants, and can result in savings by eliminating property damage from Fire Department forced entry.

Use of the Knox Rapid Entry System was authorized in July, 1993, when Section 10.302(a) of the Seattle Fire Code went into effect. The Code specifies that the Fire Department may require a key box containing access keys be installed at the entrance to structures or areas where access for the purpose of life safety or fire fighting is unduly difficult. The Code authorizes the Fire Department to determine the type of key box which is approved for use.

Examples of structures or areas in which a key box may be required include gates to large multi-family residential complexes with access roadways; locked outside entrances to stairways with enclosed standpipes; hazardous materials occupancies; building alarm system equipment locations; and occupancies where a large number of alarms occur, either for medical aid or fire, and entry is delayed.

### How Does the Knox Rapid Entry System Work?

A building owner installs or arranges for installation of a Knox key box on the exterior of the building at the main entrance point. The box will be equipped with a lock which can be opened only with a key that is issued solely to the Seattle Fire Department. Emergency vehicles, such as medical aid units and fire trucks, are equipped with one key that is held in a special security device.

At the time the Knox box is installed, the building owner arranges for the Fire Department to visit their facility, inspect the access keys that will be placed inside the Knox box, and then lock the access keys inside the Knox box using the special security key.

The building owner is not able to obtain a key to open the Knox box. If keys must be added or removed, arrangements must be made for the Seattle Fire Department to visit the facility to open the box, inspect the change of keys, and then lock the box.

When emergency access is required, the arriving Fire Department member in charge removes the key from the special security device in their Fire Department vehicle and opens the Knox box to remove the access keys. After use, the Fire Department member places the access keys in the key box, and returns the

special Knox box key to the security device inside the emergency vehicle.

## **Cost**

At the time of this writing, the hardware purchase for the Knox Rapid Entry System is generally between \$150 and \$250. This excludes labor for installation.

## **Obtaining and Installing the Knox Rapid Entry System**

When an occupancy chooses or is directed to install a key box, it is purchased from a locksmith or lock vendor.

The building owner is responsible for installation of the Knox key box. It must be mounted on the building exterior at a height of between four to six feet and within three feet of the Fire Department direct access point (front door, main gate). Flush mounted or surface recessed Knox key box installations will be permitted, provided that the Knox box is clearly marked. Various sizes of the Knox box are available depending on the number of keys that need to be contained in the box.

Once the Knox key box is installed, the building owner contacts the Seattle Fire Department Fire Prevention Division during regular office hours at 386-1450 to finalize the installation. The Fire Prevention Division will arrange for the building owner to be contacted and visited by members of the local fire station to inspect the Knox box and install the access keys

## **Other Knox Box Applications**

### *High-Rise Buildings*

A Knox box may be installed in the fire control room of a high-rise building for the storage of pass keys to various areas of that building. The Knox box must be readily identifiable and

located in a conspicuous area of the fire control room.

### *Hazardous Materials Permit Information*

A Knox document storage box may be required at selected facilities that would present a significant life safety hazard in the event of an emergency. Those buildings which require installation of a document storage box shall install the box adjacent to or in close proximity (within 2 feet) to the Knox key box.

*Knox Key Switch* devices can be used by emergency responders to open electrically operated doors and gates.

## **When is a Key Box Required**

Fire Department inspectors will determine if a Knox key box is required at a structure or area as part of their annual inspection program. If a box is required, the responsible party will be notified in writing of the need to obtain a Knox key box.

## **Status of Non-Knox Rapid Entry System Key Boxes**

In instances where an occupancy has been required to provide a key box under an earlier edition of the Fire Code, and the box in place is not a Knox box, the responsible party will be notified in writing to replace the box with a Knox key box. Responsible persons will be notified following the regular annual inspection of their occupancy.

If a building owner has voluntarily provided a key box where one is not required, and the box is not a Knox key box, the owner will be asked if he/she still desires the Fire Department to have key access to the occupancy. If the answer is yes, the owner will be directed to replace the existing key box with a Knox key box. The Fire Department will no longer use any access key box other than the Knox Rapid Entry System.

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## **Elevator Key Boxes**

The Seattle Building Code requires that a key box be installed near elevators to hold keys necessary for access to elevator machinery and controls. For elevators with Phase I recall, the key box must be located on the designated recall floor, above the recall switch. When no recall feature exists, the elevator key box should be located above the elevator call button, approximately 6 feet above the floor level.

The elevator key box may contain keys for the machine room door, secondary level door, pit door, roof door, fire emergency service, hoistway access, mechanical hoistway access devices and miscellaneous switch keys.

An elevator key box can be obtained from most locksmiths. An estimated cost for the box and one key is \$50.00 at the time of this writing.

The Seattle Building Code key box specifications require that boxes be constructed of steel, with dimensions of 6" x 8" x 1". The boxes shall be labeled "For Fire Department Use" and should be red, unless located in the main lobby directly above the elevator call button. The lock specification is a one-inch cylinder cam lock key #39504.

## **For Your Information**

Employees of the Seattle Fire Department may not be involved with the sale, promotion or installation of the Knox Rapid Entry System or any Knox Company Product.

## **Questions**

If you have questions about requirements for the Knox Rapid Entry System, or need to schedule an appointment to finalize installation of your Knox key box, call the Seattle Fire Department Fire Prevention Division at (206) 386-1450 during regular business hours.

## **Knox Rapid Entry System Vendors**

Contact your preferred lock vendor to see if they can provide the Knox Rapid Entry System for you, or contact the Knox Company for a referral. Vendors in the Seattle area that have carried the product in the past include the following:

### **Allied Security**

5901 4th Ave. S.  
Seattle, WA 98108  
(206) 767-2500

### **Argens Safe & Lock Co.**

84 S. Main Street  
Seattle, WA 98104  
(206) 623-2662

### **Bergman's Lock & Key**

1714 12th Ave.  
Seattle, WA 98122  
(206) 323-5300

### **Bulger Safe & Lock Company**

11502 Lake City Way NE  
Seattle, WA 98125  
(206) 363-8797

### **Nyberg Lock Company**

2106 3 Ave.  
Seattle, WA 98121  
(206) 448-5625

### **Secure Services**

P.O. Box 22865  
Seattle, WA 98122  
(206) 624-1115

### **The Knox Company**

17672 Armstrong  
Irvine, CA 92714  
(800) 552-5669  
[www.knoxbox.com](http://www.knoxbox.com)